The Tensions of Christmas

As we move into December, I have a sense that we, as Christians, may feel caught between what seems to be conflicting festivities: 1) a secular, commercial celebration full of material, tangible things appealing to our physical senses, and 2) one of intangible, relational, spiritual values that cherishes relationships and conveys a sense of meaning in life.

While is seems that these two images are in conflict, I think that most of us hold them in tension and try to strike a healthy balance between them. Much of the unhealthy stress and conflict during the Christmas season comes from our expectations and perceptions regarding what we think Christmas should be like rather than what it really is.

From the Advent hymn of Charles Wesley:

Come, thou long expected Jesus, born to set thy people free.
From our fears and sins release us, let us find our rest in thee.

I sense and believe that we really do want Jesus to be present with us, to be released from the fear of the unknown, to be forgiven of our mistakes and faults, and to become healed and whole. We want to rest in the arms of Jesus, loved and accepted for who we really are. Unfortunately, the world looks at the tangible, visible and material things to prove that we are loved and accepted.

This Advent I invite you to intentionally look at the events and activities that you do. Do they add meaning and joy to the season, is the activity something that is important to you? What happenings, people, events make Christmas meaningful for you? What are the essentials of Christmas? A survey by J. Robinson and J Staeheli discovered that many of us want *1) relaxed and loving time with family, 2) reasonable and realistic gifts, and 3) reliable and meaningful family traditions* (Unplug the Christmas Machine)

How might you alter your usual activities to reflect a celebration that is more healthful for you and your family? What might you do to counter-act the commercialism that seems to surround us? How might you focus on the intangible and relational aspects of our celebrations? There aren't any easy answers, but I encourage you to wrestle with the possibilities.

What has come into being in Him was Life and the Life was the Light of all people. (John 1:3b-4)

I invite you to experience Jesus' hope, joy, peace, and love as you find more health-full ways to focus on the spiritual gifts of the season. May you have a blessed and meaningful Christmas as you gaze upon the Christ-child; Immanuel, God with us!

Kae Tritle, RN
Wellness Coordinator

Dist. News Dec. 2010